

Wise Women Also Came

Matthew 2:1-12 new Revised Standard Version updated Edition

Triune Mercy Center. January 4, 2026

Today we enter the Season of Epiphany when we celebrate the coming of the light, certainly the light of Christ, but at least for me also the sunlight that increases with each day. The word Epiphany itself is a Greek word that means a stark new revelation or manifestation. Epiphanies often come in strange and unexpected ways, and they often cause people to do strange and unexpected things.

Today we receive our Epiphany stars with a new word for us to ponder and think about over the coming year. It never ceases to amaze me what one word has to teach me about some characteristic or quality that perhaps I need to work on. It could, represent some gift within me that I need to share more freely with others or a gift I need to open myself to receive more freely **from others**.

It always made me smile when I visited people in their homes and noticed five or six different Epiphany stars taped on their refrigerator. Some epiphany words either deserve or require longer than a year.

Regardless of what your new word for the year is, I hope you keep your star with you in your billfold or in a pocket of your back pack . May it be a gift of light and life for you.

My Epiphany gift for you is a quotation comes from an author and source I don't know. Regardless, I share it because it helped me look at this past year with a new perspective.

**“In 2025 Human goodness was not a single decision or directive. Rather it was ordinary people refusing to let one another fall through the cracks.**

Friends, we have lived through a year that has thrown so many individuals and families in our nation into a tail spin.....leaving them and leaving so many of us here today.... in a never-ending state of panic and fear and anxiety often because of the flourish of an expensive sharpie pen signing those never ending executive orders.

This has also been a year when so many people who had the responsibility and power to act in ways that could have helped lessen or even stop what has been done to us and this nation, yet they chose not to act either because of their own fear or their own lust for power....or because each of those fed on each other exponentially increasing the level of both their fear and their lust for power.

Nevertheless, we have this Epiphany reminder that: **“Human goodness was still present because ordinary people refused to let one another fall through the cracks.”**

I know this is true for me. As I look out at you and think about each of you who did not allow me to fall through the cracks. (I am omitting the personal examples I gave.)

Friends, think back to when the government shut down and all the food pantries got low. There was a paralyzing fear about the end of snap or so many other benefits. What did people like many of you and people all across the nation do? You held never-ending food drives which eventually filled those empty shelves.

**“Ordinary people refusing to let one another fall through the cracks.”**

Rather than only looking back at this past year as nothing over than devastating, perhaps these wise epiphany words remind us of the goodness...the goodness that was there as ordinary people like you and like me, like all of us together **refused to let one another fall through the cracks.**

We have made each of the characters in today’s Scripture into extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. Perhaps the epiphany gift both this Scripture and the art work on the front of our bulletin offers us today is to allow them to be ordinary people again doing ordinary things...the kind of things each of us as ordinary folks can do.

With this in mind,

**I invite you to listen for a word from God as it is recorded in Matthew 2: verses 1-12.**

“In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise ones came from the east to Jerusalem asking: **‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews for we have observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage.’**

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened and all Jerusalem with him and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, Herod inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him in Bethlehem of Judea for so it had been written by the prophet. ‘And you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’

Then Herod, secretly called for the wise ones to come, and he learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

Then he sent them to Bethlehem saying, **‘Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’**

When the Magi heard this from the King, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his Mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another way.”

**Thanks be to God for this life-giving Word. Amen.**

Pastor Jennifer and Pastor Trevor have been using a commentary throughout the season of Advent that has been filled with so many epiphanies....with startling new insights and learnings.... at least for me. (Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee is the author of the commentary. )

At some point during every sermon my mouth would drop open or my eyes would widen, and I would think: **“I didn’t know that.”**

This week as I was preparing to preach using this same commentary by Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee, I continued to be startled again and again with each new discovery.

I found myself thinking:

***“I didn’t know that, but why didn’t I know that?***

***How could I not have known that?***

***Why didn’t some one tell me that?***

Even though I went to Seminary 100 years ago, I **did learn** that most of our understandings about the various Christmas stories have been shaped more by traditional nativity plays and huge Christmas pageants than by what the Scripture actually says.

Everyone knows that you can't have a Christmas pageant that doesn't end with the dramatic entrance of the most elaborately dressed characters in the story. Shepherds just wore old bathrobes. Angels simply stuck their heads through some white sheet.....but Wise Men.....no expense was too much.....no burger king crowns for them..

Knowing what I know now, it feels like it was more important to protect, not the words of Scripture, but the young boys who had been waiting for years to be able to play that most important role of the entire Christmas pageant.

Can't you just see them walking down that aisle with some old woman's turban on their head they had been told from Christmas pageant legend was once worn by a real king.

They proudly held their treasure chests, which were usually just spray painted shoe boxes covered with old costume jewelry that contained some elements they believed were actually myrrh, frankincense... and gold.....unless the young man who carried the gold had figured out they were actually pieces of chocolate wrapped with gold aluminum foil.

If the other two kings placed their treasure chests in front of the manger and opened them with a grand flourish as practiced but the king with the gold pieces simply put his down and then quickly departed, as the Scripture says, by another way out the side door, the experienced Christmas pageant director always knew what had happened.

Despite all those Christmas pageants, there was one thing I didn't have to learn from Dr. Lee's commentary. Even I was smart enough to know that the Wise Men didn't find Jesus in a manger because by this point he was probably a two year old and the family had moved into a house. Probably not the best ending for a Christmas pageant.

But oh my goodness, when I moved away from the Christmas pageant version of the story back to the study of the Greek language, my mind was blown wide open once again.

The Greek phrase used to refer to the Magi does not have to be translated exclusively as men. It's one of the many Greek words that can refer to someone who is either male OR female. The gender isn't determined or

established for ever and ever. Amen. Could I possibly be the only person who studied Greek for an entire year and didn't learn this?

But there is more. Those Mysterious Magi who not only studied the most ancient texts available to them about human history as well as had a keen interest in astrology and the revelations the sky had for those with scientific, curious minds were part of an ancient religious faith where both women and men could be Magi, Wise Ones.

My mouth dropped open again just as it had every other week of Advent with the new revelations Pastor Trevor and Pastor Jennifer have shared to help these text come alive not only to us but within us. Then I looked down again at the art on our bulletin cover for today...and it felt like one of those moments when something you've always known comes together with something you are learning again as if for the first time. Of course wise women could have been the ones who were called from within their own wombs to follow the star to that place where the Christ was born.

Despite what I had just learned, reality comes back with a harsh jarring blow. Herod was still the ruthless paranoid ruler who did whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted to do it with no justification or reason other than boosting his own paranoid but also self-serving ego. The very thought of him really listen to a group of women tell him that they had traveled by themselves for two years to find the one who would be the new king of the Jews because they wanted to worship him. This is the most absurd and ridiculous idea imaginable.

If you disagree, imagine Nancy Pelosi, Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris coming into the oval office unannounced to tell the King, I mean the president, it was time for him to go. He had brought so much damage to the country and to our people, especially our immigrants, that it was simply time for him to go now..

Allow yourself to sit with that for a moment and then it becomes easier to think about what it would have been like for those wise women to enter Herod's Court to announce a new king of the Jews had been born.

My point is that it's really not important whether the Magi were men or women....

I know you can't believe I'm saying that, but it's true.

What does matter is the quality of relationships that seem to come so easy for many women to develop. Relationships like those portrayed on the front of our bulletin.

Look at that piece of art again; for it reveals the most important message from this passage for me.

Look deeply and you will see people who are in relationships that make life rich with color and beauty and movement .....and dare I say fun.

When I look I see relationships based on mutual trust and respect rather than some hierarchical pecking order where every one knows who is over whom and what power that provides.

The women in this picture are in a circle with the baby in the middle because wise people know the truth that has been studied and documented for years.

The early months and years of a child's life are the most important time in shaping who that child will become from the level of their intelligence to their sense of confidence in themselves, to the ease with which they can learn and are always open to what is new with a sense of curiosity and wonder.

Thus it requires every bit of wisdom and love and care that can be found to care for that little one at such a vulnerable time in life.

Wise men and wise women also know that new moms need not extravagant but practical gifts and even more importantly the gift of time - time to listen, time to teach, time to give hugs and love even when those doubts and fears come that every new mama experiences. It doesn't matter whether these feelings are because of hormones or something else. That mother needs holding and tending as much as the baby.

So if you look within this circle you see not only the wise one who came from afar to bring her gifts but you also see the baby and the mother - a different kind of trinity of relationships..

Wise people know that our society, our government needs to create laws and structures and places where not just privileged women can experience each of the gifts portrayed by this art, but all women and their children need the same.

And as long as the fearful, weak king remains in his palace bringing as much destruction and suffering as his wicked mind can conceive, it is up to ordinary people like these women and all of us to bring the gifts that really matter to each other.

I want to close with my favorite poem of all time by Jan Richardson which is entitled **Wise** women also came.

As I read, perhaps you may want to look again at the circle of love portrayed in the art and feel the love flowing in and among and through each of the holy ones there as gifts for you.

**Wise women also came.**

The fire burned in their wombs  
long before they saw the flaming star in the sky.  
They walked in shadows,  
trusting the path would open  
under the light of the moon.

Wise women also came seeking no directions,  
no permission from any king.  
Wise women also came  
by their own authority,  
their own desire,  
their own longing.  
Wise women also came  
in quiet spreading no rumors  
sparking no fears  
to lead to innocents' slaughter,  
to their sister Rachel's  
inconsolable lamentations.

Wise women also came,  
and they brought useful gifts:  
water for labor's washing;

fire for warm illumination;  
a blanket for swaddling.

Wise women also came,  
at least three of them,  
holding Mary in her labor,  
crying out with her in the birth pangs,  
breathing ancient blessings into her ear.

Wise women also came,  
and they went  
as wise women always do  
home a different way.

May it be so. Amen.  
Preached by Rev. Susie Smith